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NEWS RELEASE

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Contact: Native American Journalists Association, (612) 874-8833; Patia Stephens, University Communications, (406) 243-2488.

FORMER UM STUDENT WINS BEST DOCUMENTARY AWARD

MISSOULA--

A former student at The University of Montana School of Journalism recently was honored with a first-place award for "best documentary" from the Native American Journalists Association.

Johnna Espinoza's television documentary, "Indian Basketball: A Wider Circle," was part of her project for a master's degree. The half-hour documentary, which premiered last March, focuses on four legendary Indian basketball players from Montana and the cultural importance of the sport.

"I was really pleased," Espinoza said. "To be recognized for all that work was a thrill."

Espinoza wrote and produced the documentary, but credited its success to the combined efforts of many students and faculty. The photographer was James Rafferty and editor was Shannon Dell, both UM students.

The documentary was inspired by stories Espinoza heard, while growing up, about great American Indian basketball players. "Indian Basketball" beat out competition that included documentaries on a variety of subjects, not just sports.

"One thing I found that was different was the way she put the story together," said

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Espinoza.rl-2

Dennis Silva, sports anchor and sports managing editor for Conus Communications, and one of the NAJA contest judges. "She gave you a lot of information without making it just a bunch of facts and figures. She told a story and I learned without realizing."

Espinoza, currently working for the Idaho Statesman newspaper in Boise, Idaho, hails from Arlee. "I like the idea that (the documentary is) about Montanans and was shot in Montana," she said. "That means a lot to me."

The purpose of the Native American Journalists Association contest is to recognize excellence in journalism by American Indian journalists in all media. Contestants must be NAJA members. For more information on NAJA, call (612) 874-8833 or visit the organization's web page at <http://www.medill.nwu.edu/naja/>.

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Local, Kaimin, Charkoosta News, Idaho Statesman
Espinoza.wpd